

Conflict: The Practice of Discussion

Our theme this month is Conflict, the Practice of Discussion. Derived from the Latin *conflictus*, conflict means to strike together. The Latin root of the word discussion means to shake apart.

So often, it seems, we consider the notion of conflict, in relationship with others, as something negative. We may find ourselves attempting to avoid situations in which there may be a conflict because we fear psychological pain, discomfort, or loss. It may be in our nature as humans to win, but we also have a need to seek comfort and ease. Being in relationship with others includes challenge, which may lead to unavoidable conflict. So, do we strike together and *at* one another in conflict, or do we practice shaking things apart *with* each other through discussion?

When a person attempts to passively avoid a conflict silently disregarding their personal needs, does it mean that the other/s are the winners? Conversely, when one responds in an aggressive manner do they force their way in becoming the winner? The late journalist, Dorothy Thompson suggests a better way -- "*Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict -- alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence.*"

Conflict may be unavoidable but we always have a choice in how we respond to it. Imagine if we choose to embrace conflict as a gift, an opportunity for ourselves and the others involved to grow as a result. Embracing the discomfort and proceeding with assertive and mindful discussion can help us grow in right relationship. Such practice can be spiritually transformative.

Questions for Discussion and Discernment on your own, or with each other:

- What does being involved in a conflict mean to you? Are there certain topics about which you have had repeated conflicts? What are they? Are there certain people with whom you've had repeated conflicts? How does this affect the nature of these relationships?
- Why does conflict cause so much difficulty or discomfort for many of us? What are some conflict-avoidant behaviors that you might engage in? What might underlie these patterns of behavior?
- What are some of the things that can derail a discussion? How can these things be avoided?
- How do you remain true to yourself while retaining the appropriate level of openness and respect to others?
- Can you imagine a world in which there is no conflict? Why or why not? What would it look like?
- What are your best practices for resolving conflict?

Practices from the Worship Committee:

"Adopt an attitude of curiosity. Learn to ask yourself, 'I wonder...'. Embrace and stay with the discomfort that conflict brings. Lean in and seize the opportunity for growth." -- Jane Detwiler

"When a conflict or a dispute looms, know what you want, find out what the other party wants, and try to aim for the greatest total sum of satisfaction." -- Penn Young

"Learn to apologize in a genuine and direct manner. Instead of 'I'm sorry that **you** -- that you misunderstood, that you were offended' -- say, 'I'm sorry that **I** -- that I let you down, that I spoke harshly.'" -- Rita Ghilani

"Each person involved in a conflict must be willing to be met for there to be a productive outcome. The unwillingness of one person to be met negates the possibility for both of progress towards common aims."-- Peggy Homer

"Approach the other with respect, dignity and love; get the truth told as best as possible; see what the next step is and take it." -- Alan Cantor

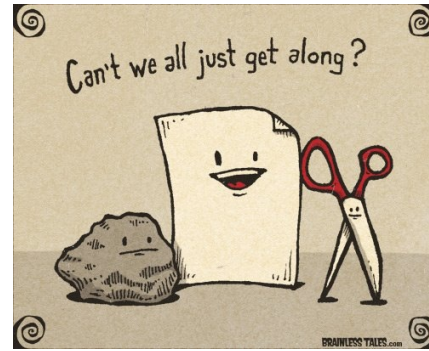
"Quickly catalog the physical sensations you're experiencing: hot or cold? Tired or alert? What does the chair feel like? Is your jaw clenched? The more you can focus on what your body feels the better you can be present to what's important." -- Julien Lafleur

Quotes and short readings:

An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.”
– Mahatma Gandhi

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
-- Philipians 2:4

“Resolution, like responsibility, is a product of ownership, and kids can’t resolve a conflict until they figure out how they contributed to it.”
– Richard Eyre



“When you talk to others, you may place yourself in the following five positions: I will speak at the right time; I will present facts; I will use soft language; I will speak for the listener’s benefit; I will talk with compassion.”
--Sariputta (Buddha’s chief disciple), *The Numerical Discourses*

“The opponent strikes you on your cheek, and you strike him on the heart by your amazing spiritual audacity in turning the other cheek. You wrest the offensive from him by refusing to take his weapons, by keeping your own, and by striking him in his conscience from a higher level. He hits you physically, and you hit him spiritually.”
– E. Stanley Jones, *Gandhi: Portrayal of a Friend*

“On a collective level, the mind-set ‘We are right and they are wrong’ is particularly deeply entrenched in those parts of the world where conflict between two nations, races, tribes, religions, or ideologies is long-standing, extreme, and endemic. Both sides of the conflict are equally identified with their own perspective, their own ‘story,’ that is to say, identified with thought. Both are equally incapable of seeing that another perspective, another story, may exist and also be valid. Israeli Writer Yossie Halevi speaks of the possibility of ‘accommodating a competing narrative,’ but in many parts of the world, people are not yet able or willing to do that.”
--Eckhart Tolle

A night full of talking that hurts,
My worst held-back secrets. Everything
has to do with loving and not loving.
This night will pass.
Then we have work to do
-- Rumi

“The most intense conflicts, if overcome, leave behind a sense of security and calm that is not easily disturbed. It is just these intense conflicts and their conflagration which are needed to produce valuable and lasting results.”
-- Carl Gustav Jung

✂ We welcome your thoughts on Conflict: the Practice of Discussion. Feel free to answer a question or share a story from your life, then either post it on the Worship Associates board in Unity Hall, or leave it in a basket to be posted later. You may be anonymous or not, as you choose.
